

# **Toward Inclusive Excellence at Lake Superior State University: A Provisional Profile on the Status of Campus Diversity and Equity**

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This report offers a provisional profile of the status of diversity at Lake Superior State University, based principally upon the King-Chavez-Park Visiting Professor appointment that I was fortunate to hold during the Fall 2010 semester. I qualify my analysis and assessment as “provisional” because I’m well aware that my observations are limited by my relatively brief experience and short tenure at LSSU. My four-month KCP position marked the second time that I have visited the LSSU campus. My first visit took place in October 2007 for only three days, when I presented at a performance studies conference and also did a presentation at a faculty forum, where I spoke about diversity issues at LSSU.

During this past Fall 2010 semester, I benefitted from direct experience on campus with students, faculty and staff, gaining insights particularly from teaching two sections of SOCY 103 Cultural Diversity and from numerous informal conversations with students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Over the course of the four months I was in residence on campus, I recorded extensive field notes on my experience and observations on the status of diversity at LSSU. I engaged in a kind of participatory research, drawing upon critical interpretive grounded theory and methodology.

In preparing this report, I also reviewed a number of documents including the LSSU Mission statement, the Values statement, Code of Ethics, EEO statement of compliance, the academic catalog, faculty handbook, prior LSSU accreditation self-studies, past iterations of strategic plans, the 2005 progress report sent to the HLC reporting on assessment and diversity, the HLC response to the 2005 report, a wide range of statistical and data reports on LSSU, Michigan, public universities in Michigan, and regional and national demographic profiles. <sup>1</sup>

This report is organized into three sections: I. Overview of the Status of Diversity at LSSU: Productive, Problematic, and Promising; II. Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Core Components – Assessing Diversity at LSSU; and III. A Sense and Semblance of an Ending – Emergent Questions and Recommendations.

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[I want to extend my appreciation and thanks to the LSSU campus community for their kind and generous hospitality during my visit during the Fall 2010 semester. In particular, I am grateful to Dean Gary Balfantz, Vice President Kenneth Peress, Professor Leslie Dobbertin, and Ms. Stephanie Sabatine for making this opportunity possible and for their gracious support. Special thanks to Cathy Smith, Jeff Oja, and Colleen Kinghorn for their warmth, good humor, and kindness.]

## **Section I**

### **Overview of the Status of Diversity at LSSU: Productive, Problematic, and Promising**

In October 2007, I had the opportunity to visit Lake Superior State University for the first time, having been invited to participate in a conference and to do a presentation at a noontime faculty forum. For the forum, I offered an admittedly “outsider” perspective on diversity at LSSU. I titled my presentation, “Yoopers in Da ‘Hood: Decentering Diversity, ‘Home,’ and Homogeneity.” Based principally on online data and documents made available to me by faculty and administrators at the university at that time, I proposed very tentatively a series of observations about how the state of diversity at LSSU might be assessed with an eye toward general strategies for enhancing existing communities and opportunities, as well as extending future outreach and development efforts in forging a more inclusive and equitable campus. I acknowledged then, as I do now, that my perspective and recommendations were and are necessarily partial and constrained by my limited tenure at Lake State and by an understanding of LSSU’s history and current status that may come up short in appreciating both the big picture and the subtle nuances that constitute the life and culture of LSSU. In this context, my observations and conclusions are offered in good faith, however qualified and provisional they might be.

Below are general observations about the current state of diversity at LSSU, characterized in terms of Productive, Problematic, and Promising patterns, trends, and achievements. This overview is intended to help thematize the more specific discussion of the HLC Core Components in the next section of this report.

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#### PRODUCTIVE

- Diversity is a “core value” at LSSU, which bodes well for strategic planning and governance. As the initial phases of planning have progressed, diversity considerations have been well represented to date.
- Diversity manifests in multiple forms, identities, and communities on campus. Although this range of diverse constituencies is not immediately evident, there is a quietly rich and robust mosaic of differences that belies initial impressions based on the outward appearance of the campus community.

- The geographical location of LSSU, including the presence of substantial Native American communities as well as the borderland region joining the U.S. and Canada, offers immense possibilities for multicultural engagement on and off campus.
- LSSU has the highest percentage of Native American students of any four-year public university in Michigan and states included in the Great Lakes region (Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Minnesota).
- Although Native American students collectively graduated at a rate lower than the overall LSSU student average, Native American women in 2008 exceeded the graduation rate of the general student population (see Appendices A and B).
- The Native American Center has become a gathering point, a site where campus and community can and do come together in ways that extend the learning environment beyond the classroom.
- Women comprise 65% of current administrative, managerial, and director positions.
- Demonstrable and substantial evidence of dedicated, experienced, and talented faculty and staff, working under severe budgetary constraints, evince a strong base from which to build a more inclusive and welcoming campus.

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## PROBLEMATIC

- Diversity at LSSU is an “absent presence”: that is, a range of diverse constituencies and communities do exist and are present on campus, but institutionally, they are hidden, invisible, marginalized. There appears to be no integrated, systemic approach to addressing diversity, inclusion, and equity concerns at Lake State. The overarching perspective, which seems to begin and end with a tacit ethic of “First, do no harm,” treats diversity as supplemental and compartmentalized. Diversity as a matter of administrative policy and practice occupies a secondary or even tertiary ranking in institutional priorities at best. Except for incidental and occasional mentions in the strategic planning process, diversity is otherwise largely if not altogether absent from public discourse. Among most if not all constituencies on campus, diversity and equity are afterthoughts rather than definitive and integral concerns that could and should be a routine part of policy and planning deliberations.

- There are no readily available institutional definitions of 1) what socio-cultural dimensions and whose identities and communities constitute “diversity” and 2) what the relationship of diversity is to equity, inclusiveness, and academic excellence.
- Public conversations about diversity, equity, inclusion, and academic excellence need to take place routinely and consistently across all university constituencies but particularly need to emanate from the Board of Trustees and senior administrators. Without vocal advocacy and intentional actions from all segments of the university community, diversity will remain peripheral and compartmentalized as a matter of institutional philosophy, policy, and practice.
- Questions of taken-for-granted forms of privilege and entitlement need to be raised and discussed openly and honestly in academic, co-curricular, and professional work settings. (See Appendix C, Frances A. Maher and Mary Kay Tetreault, “Diversity and Privilege,” American Association of University Professors (AAUP):  
<http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2009/JF/Feat/mahl.htm>.)
- Students of color from historically underrepresented and underserved groups (other than Native Americans) are largely “missing in action” at LSSU, literally and figuratively. The numbers are disproportionately low, even given the variables of location, the demographics of the region and of student populations in “feeder” schools, and other contingencies.  
[N.B. There is a curious pattern that caught my attention and might be worth a look. Having examined the IPEDS annual enrollment data from Fall 2001 through 2009, I noted a sharp spike from 2001 until 2006 in the number of Black/African American students – only 12 in Fall 2001 to a high of 241 in Fall 2006 – followed by a precipitous decline to only 20 African American students in Fall 2008 and 23 in Fall 2009 (see Appendix E).<sup>2</sup> There may be a simple – or a complicated – explanation for this dramatic rise and even more startling drop in African American students over a 2-3 year period, but since I discovered this only after I had ended my visit, I have been unable to determine the reasons for this significant and troubling spike and then plummet in numbers. Regardless, it certainly seems worth examining and considering in future campus conversations about student representation and recruitment. I believe that there are several pertinent questions: Was a particular program eliminated due to funding cuts? Were financial aid packages reduced dramatically? Were there external factors that contributed to the apparently drastic plummet in numbers? What happened? What are the current and future implications? ]

- Diversity of representation is even more dire when one looks at the faculty demographic profile. During the Fall 2010 semester, there were *no* Native American, African American, or Hispanic/Latino faculty. There were several Asian/Asian Americans among the full-time or part-time faculty. More promising is the representation of women among the LSSU faculty, which is within 3% of the national mean and is equivalent to the state average in four-year public universities. Women at Lake State cumulatively are more numerous than men in tenured and tenure track positions although women comprise only 1/3 of all tenured faculty.
- There are no persons of color currently among senior administrators. There is one woman of color in a Director's position.
- Diversity-related and multicultural programming and campus organizations are valuable and necessary but not sufficient in developing an ethic of equity and inclusiveness throughout the culture of the university.
- Campus climate is difficult to assess in part because data documenting the experiences of students, faculty, and staff from diverse communities are scarce. The university participates in the annual National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), but this body of evidence represents only a starting point for evaluating the tenor and temper of the campus climate at LSSU. A comprehensive climate study, as well as routine entry and exit interviews, focus groups, and other methods of data collection canvassing students, faculty, and staff, would help to establish benchmarks for assessing the extent to which Lake State's climate and culture are inclusive and welcoming.
- The GE Diversity requirement in the academic catalog identifies a single "Diversity Outcome" but does not include specific learning outcomes. There are no discernible follow-up curricular or co-curricular opportunities suggested or recommended in the catalog or in other university materials. The overall approach to diversity learning appears to be fragmented to the extent that courses are not directly and clearly aligned with the university's mission or to specific learning goals and outcomes. Diversity Learning Outcomes need to be specified, disseminated, and aligned with existing curricula, and as appropriate, new courses need to be developed in order to comprehensively and developmentally fulfill diversity learning from initial entry to graduation and exit from LSSU. <sup>3</sup>
- There are isolated curricular offerings focusing on diverse identities and communities: there are a handful of African American-themed courses; except for a course on literature of the southwestern U.S. there are no other courses on Hispanics/Latinos in the U.S.; there is no coursework on Asian Americans; there is an impressive series of Native American Studies courses

- but absent qualified instructors, the Native American Studies courses are not presently being offered, and the Native Studies of the Americas minor is defunct. There are a few gender-related courses (but no minor in gender or women’s studies). There is no course specifically emphasizing comparative religions or cross-cultural spiritual traditions, although some humanities and philosophy courses include religion as a subtopic. There is a single course on Middle East politics with an emphasis on Islam. There are no courses highlighting GLBT issues. There are a handful of courses that address disability issues, primarily from legal, educational or therapeutic standpoints.
- The Native Studies in the Americas minor needs to be revisited and revitalized. Given the substantial indigenous population in the locality and region, above and beyond Native students’ comprising the largest minority student cohort on campus, Native American course work and the minor are invaluable in potentially marking LSSU as a distinctive, learning-centered, regionally responsive organization.
  - The Native American Center carries the onus of diversity-centered work at LSSU, but because of its peripheral placement, literally and figuratively, it exists only on and in the margins of campus. Assigning diversity responsibilities to the Director of the NAC without adequate staffing to support these duties constitutes an overload and undermines the university’s declared commitment to diversity as a core value and as a central feature of its mission.
  - Despite this litany of concerns, I believe that the potential for creating an environment of “inclusive excellence,” as noted in the section above, is not only viable but incipient as a real and practicable possibility – but this will require intentional and sustained attention and direct action to remediate historical inattention and current inequities in the status of diversity and equity at Lake State.

## PROMISING

- Diversity manifests in multiple forms, identities, and communities on campus, as noted above. Defining and prioritizing a distinctive, regional set of emphases that localizes diversity commitments, while recognizing the larger state and national and global contexts, is a viable possibility – but only if there is a demonstrable and decisive institutional commitment advanced by campus-wide leadership in advocating and acting upon diversity and equity initiatives.

- The potential to develop a culture and climate of “inclusive excellence” is incipient but unrealized at LSSU. As characterized by the Association for American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), “Making excellence inclusive is . . . an active process through which colleges and universities achieve excellence in learning, teaching, student development, institutional functioning, and engagement in local and global communities . . . The action of making excellence inclusive requires that we uncover inequities in student success, identify effective educational practices, and build such practices organically for sustained institutional change” (AAC&U, “Making Excellent Exclusive,” [http://www.aacu.org/compass/inclusive\\_excellence.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/compass/inclusive_excellence.cfm) -- see Appendix E; for a recent commentary on this approach, see Appendix F).
- The Diversity Committee is a potentially influential change agent on campus, but a higher, more visible institutional profile is required, and it is worth considering extending the committee leadership to include co-chairs representing both faculty and staff constituencies.

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The next section in this report provides summary observations for each of the five HLC Core Components relevant to diversity concerns. Each section discusses diversity at LSSU in terms of Productive, Problematic, and Promising achievements, patterns, and possibilities.

## SECTION II

### Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Core Components: Assessing Diversity at LSSU

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#### The Distinctive Organization

##### Appreciates diversity . . .

The distinctive organization understands the complexity of the diverse society in which it is located, and it can identify how it responsibly responds to that society while honoring its unique mission. Whether diversity marks the classroom or the curriculum, whether learning about diversity is shaped by the students and faculty who fill the classrooms or by students' off-campus experiences, the distinctive organization serves the common good by honoring the worth of all individuals. (*HLC Handbook of Accreditation*, 3.3-4)

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#### **Core Component 1b: In its mission documents, the organization recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.**

Diversity is a complex concept. For some organizations, ethnic and racial representation on campus, in educational programs, or in faculty and administration might be very important, particularly if their mission is to serve communities marked by ethnic and cultural diversity. ***For many organizations serving educational needs of rural or homogeneous communities, recognition and understanding of the impact of diversity may be more important than representation.*** (*HLC Handbook*, 3.2-2, 3, emphasis added)

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The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) acknowledges that geographical and demographic conditions may influence directly and substantially the ability of institutions to achieve high proportions of representation from specific ethnic and racial groups. <sup>4</sup> It comes as no surprise that universities located in urban areas with significant populations of communities of color are far more likely to have more racially and ethnically diverse representation among students than in schools in outstate and historically more homogeneous regions. It is apparent that LSSU is in

this latter category; but while it may be entirely legitimate to assert that “recognition and understanding of the impact of diversity may be more important than representation,” the real and perceived diversity at Lake State requires a more nuanced understanding.

Diversity at Lake Superior State University is a moving target, vacillating between the relative presence and absence of shifting identities and communities based upon both conventional and unconventional socio-cultural categories. This sense of diversity as elusive and opaque, rather than immediately conspicuous and transparent, was both supported and subverted by my semester-long visit. Perhaps not surprisingly, as I lived and worked on campus, albeit for a relatively brief time, I discovered that the profile and experience of diversity at LSSU are far more complex and much richer than my initial perceptions had led me to expect. (I examine in detail the statistical profile of race, ethnicity, and gender-based diversity among students, faculty, and administrators under Core Component 2a.) Below, I offer observations based on Productive, Problematic, and Promising developments that I believe are pertinent to Core Component 1b.

#### PRODUCTIVE:

1. Articulating diversity as a core value whereby “Students experience a campus community which is inclusive and welcoming” publicly acknowledges diversity as integral (not supplemental or peripheral) to the university’s mission: this is an admirable and estimable institutional commitment.
2. The university explicitly declares that its target priorities are the peoples and resources of this region of the state in all of its particularity and specificity. This regional focus in the university’s planning documents necessitates an understanding of diversity in that same light. As such, the presence of vibrant and rich indigenous communities compellingly (though certainly not exclusively) defines the character of diversity for the Eastern Upper Peninsula, Sault Ste. Marie, and LSSU. Taken seriously, this should attenuate the unrealistic “boilerplate” expectation that LSSU should mirror the racial and ethnic representation of similarly situated schools in a comparator cohort. This claim is addressed further – and qualified – under Core Component 2a below.
3. University-wide programming, particularly under the auspices of Student Affairs, has demonstrated good-faith efforts to address the needs, interests and issues of diverse communities. One salient example during the Fall 2010 semester was the revitalization of a GLBT student organization on campus,

which dovetailed with a series of campus events and guest speakers emphasizing GLBT issues.

4. Consistent with its mission, LSSU makes the university's facilities and resources available to a wide range of community organizations on a consistent and frequent basis. Often, these events reflect the diversity of the region.

#### PROBLEMATIC:

1. Although a commitment to diversity is evident in the university's planning documents, including its mission statement, core values, code of ethics, and pending strategic plan, during my two visits to LSSU, I have been unable to locate or discern a working definition or even a provisional listing of diversity components or dimensions in these and other formal and informal records. My understanding is that to date, various and repeated efforts have been made to arrive at a university-sanctioned definition (or minimally, guidelines) for what constitutes diversity at LSSU. These past attempts, as I understand it, have been stymied for multiple reasons that remain unknown to me. I am aware that exactly this kind of stalemate has been the bane of most if not all schools at some point, as they work to determine the appropriate role and function of diversity in the life and culture of their respective organizations. At the risk of eliciting deep sighs of frustration and "here we go again" eye-rolling, I'm suggesting that the challenge of forging a working, consensual, and public statement on diversity should be re-visited. The statement should include a definition of diversity; its role and function in the mission and vision and in the structure and culture of the university; its relationship to equity, inclusion, and social justice as they manifest on and off campus; and its centrality in realizing academic excellence. This challenge might be taken on by the university's Diversity Committee, but leadership on this initiative to clarify and publicize the organization's understanding of diversity must be advanced by senior administrators and the Board of Trustees, as well.

I realize that many may regard this kind of effort as an exercise in futility or as an unnecessary rehashing of old ground and of even older arguments that have seemed unproductive and redundant. Regardless, without a minimal understanding (if not universal agreement) about what constituencies and communities fall under the umbrella of diversity, the task of planning – and especially prioritizing – how and where diversity initiatives should be advanced are likely to be caught up not only in competing agendas, but in

fundamental misunderstandings about what does and does not qualify as properly diversity-based concerns. Given the latitude that the HLC recognizes is necessary in universities' definitions of diversity based on situational factors and local contingencies, a statement that strategically delineates principal target communities and constituencies would facilitate careful and prudent planning in a time of severe budgetary constraints. Equally, without an explicit description of what constitutes diversity at LSSU, aligning diversity commitments with the university's mission and vision risks becoming an unfocused, overly generalized abstraction.

This question of definitional clarity and adequacy is also closely aligned with Core Component 2a ("the organization's planning documents show careful attention to the organization's function in a multicultural society"). Further, the capacity to effectively address constituencies' needs and expectations, as called for in Core Component 5a, is entirely contingent upon a consensual understanding of what and who diversity engenders.

Establishing workable and realistic parameters for subject populations that fall within the institutional definition of diversity is of paramount importance. Casting the net too widely diminishes and neutralizes the purpose of advancing diversity in the service of equity and academic excellence. Casting the net too narrowly subverts the very conception and value of diversity to engender multiple communities not as an end in itself but to provide optimal learning possibilities in a rich and varied academic environment.

The closest that LSSU has come to providing a direct definition or description of what constitutes "diversity" is the statement provided in the progress report on the university's diversity commitment and efforts submitted to the HLC in 2005. The document provides what I regard as an overly broad and unfocused description of the various elements that ostensibly constitute diversity in the campus community. This "kitchen sink" approach to characterizing diversity says too much and too little. Diversity becomes an encompassing term that engenders any and all variations, individual and collective, resulting in a lack of conceptual clarity and coherence. Perhaps more importantly, it fails to address the central role and importance of equity, power, privilege, and entitlement that are the motive forces driving the commitment to integrate and advance diversity and inclusion in higher education.

The actual and potential value of diversity has been neutralized by institutions that have advanced it as normative, as a “value” that manifests in the “celebration” of all differences, individual and collective. Routinely accompanying this uncritical and superficial recognition of difference is an indiscriminate conflating of any and all differences under the rubric of “diversity” or “multiculturalism.” Diversity becomes little more than cosmetic and “feel-good” gestures resulting in token programming and incidental events that lend a veneer of inclusiveness and acceptance, while neglecting substantive questions of access, representation, and participation in the life and culture of the organization. This is not merely a “straw person” claim; many universities and colleges across the nation have adopted this kind of framework guiding their diversity efforts. I am not asserting or implying that this simplistic view of diversity necessarily applies to Lake State. What I am saying is that LSSU’s perspective on diversity is unclear and ill-defined and that absent a consensual, institutional statement on what diversity means and how its priority as a core value translates into policy and practice, the university risks becoming a site where diversity has no real substance.

#### PROMISING:

1. Moving the university toward realizing diversity as an integral dimension of campus life and culture is a daunting challenge. The July 2010 retreat (discussed further under Core Component 2a) launched the current strategic planning process and also opened a prospective pathway toward inclusive excellence by foregrounding diversity as an institutionally sanctioned core value. In this regard defining diversity, equity and inclusion becomes not merely an abstract exercise but an exigency in delineating criteria and benchmarks for advancing and assessing diversity as a core value in practice, institutionally and individually. A “standard” definition (if such a thing exists) would include the full range of human differences, individual and collective, that constitute identities and communities, including social constructions such as race, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, sexual identity, sexual orientation, age, and disability. Understood as historically situated, diversity, equity, and social justice are best understood as complementary values requiring careful consideration of the effects of power, oppression, and marginalization on how social identities and communities have been constituted. Equity and inclusion should be assessed based on how historically oppressed and marginalized groups fare along four indices: access, representation, participation, and decision making.

2. Given the new leadership in the highest administrative ranks, there seems to me to be a guarded but palpable sense of optimism on campus that this stabilizing of leadership may enable LSSU to regain its bearings and move productively forward. This sense of renewal will also encompass, one hopes, a re-dedication to the pursuit of diversity and equity commitments as intrinsic to achieving academic excellence – but this is going to require that the Board of Trustees, President, Provost, Vice Presidents, Deans, and faculty, staff and students all undertake direct advocacy in moving diversity from words to actions.
3. The phases of the strategic planning process that I had the opportunity to observe and participate in during the fall semester were well conceived and well implemented. Multiple venues, methods, and occasions to contribute ideas and information were available to all constituencies on campus. If you were unaware of these opportunities for input and engagement, you would have to be either unconscious or oblivious. Participation was widely invited, encouraged, and publicized. When I reviewed the interim progress report just before leaving campus at the end of the semester, it appeared that there was appropriate attention accorded to diversity and equity concerns. My hope is that this emphasis will be sustained through the plan's final stages. This observation about the planning process takes us into the next Core Component.

**Core Component 2a: The organization realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.**

Fundamental to preparing for the future is an inventory of the trends that will create multiple new contexts for the organization . . . The effect of shared governance can change if the total organization values innovation, experimentation, and risk-taking. However, even the most entrepreneurial college knows that there are boundaries to what it can and should attempt. The organization defines clearly how its goals are set by recognizing and honoring those boundaries. (*HLC Handbook*, 3.2-6)

- ***The organization's planning documents show careful attention to the organization's function in a multicultural society.(2a3)***

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PRODUCTIVE:

1. The current Strategic Planning and Governance process highlights the collaborative efforts from faculty and administration to forge a set of practicable and sustainable pathways for the university's ongoing growth and development. As reported in *A Strategic Framework for Planning* (July 2010), the campus-wide retreat produced a useful and an apparently candid and admirably self-reflexive framework for the planning process. The retreat engaged participation from faculty, staff, administration, trustees, and students. Given that a commitment to diversity was one of four core values that resulted from the retreat activities, it is reasonable to conclude that it was seriously deliberated as a major theme.
2. I had the opportunity to meet a number of new and veteran faculty and staff, who are well positioned with the expertise and experience to research and address both the "big" questions and the LSSU-specific implications of social and economic trends that will circumscribe diversity, equity, and social justice commitments in the future. With the university's Diversity Committee, these dedicated faculty and staff may well constitute a critical mass that can advance progress in aligning diversity initiatives with the university's mission and vision via the strategic planning process.

PROBLEMATIC:

1. As noted under Core Component 1b, the lack of clarity and specificity in LSSU's understanding of what and who constitutes "diversity" undermines its appropriate role and value in realizing the university's mission and vision;

the same claim applies to inhibiting the capacity of the organization to “show careful attention to the organization’s function in a multicultural society.” Perhaps one place to begin in guiding LSSU’s diversity planning efforts is to turn attention to a demographic profile of faculty and student diversity, which I now take up.

A statistical profile provides a point of departure, suggesting both the constraints on and possibilities for strategic planning in advancing racial, ethnic, and gender diversity and equity at LSSU. The chart below provides an overview of student enrollment demographics at national, state, and local levels. <sup>5</sup>

### LAKE SUPERIOR STATE UNIVERSITY Fall 2008 Enrollment

	Men	Women	White	Black	Hispanic (any race)	Asian Pac Isl	American Indian	2 or more races	Non res	Unknown
Nation	42.6	57.4	57.7	12.6	11.2	6.0	1.0	.008	3.4	8.0
Michigan	42.7	57.3	74.9	14.0	2.9	3.4	.8	n/a	3.8	n/a
LSSU	47.6	52.4	78.1	0.82	0.82	0.35	7.8	n/a	10.8	1.2

Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Center (IPEDS)

There is a relatively modest difference (approximately 5% lower) in the representation of women at LSSU than at both national and state levels. The more conspicuous discrepancies between the nation/Michigan and LSSU are in the comparative proportions of all of the major racial and ethnic categories, except for Native American representation. Individuals from Black, Hispanic, and Asian Pacific Islander groups comprise under 1% respectively in the overall LSSU student body. However, the 7.8% of Native Americans on campus is the highest proportion of any university in Michigan and in the Great Lakes region; and it surpasses by almost eight times the

national average. Also noteworthy, is the figure for non-resident students (10.8%), exceeding by three times the national and state averages.

A closer look at four-year public institutions in Michigan finds LSSU in the bottom third of the 15 state-supported universities in the overall cumulative percentage of historically underrepresented and underserved minorities (Black-African Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, Asian Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans). LSSU's total minority student population comes in at 10%, with the statewide mean at 15.16% and median at 14%, including a high of 36% at Wayne State University and a low of 5% at both Northern Michigan University and Michigan Tech University. (For a complete listing and breakdown by race and ethnicity of Michigan's 15 four-year public universities for Fall 2008, see Appendix G.)

In disaggregating the data, it is evident that the distribution of racial and ethnic minority representation at LSSU is skewed by virtue of the high percentage of Native American students. Absent this segment of the student population, students of color from Black, Hispanic, and Asian groups cumulatively comprise under 2% of the total student enrollment. At first blush, these figures seem strikingly low, and while numbers are one important measure of diversity, they can also conceal as much as they might reveal about how diversity manifests in ways peculiar to this organization, in this region and locality of this state. (The historical and social variables that likely influence the demographic distribution at Lake State are discussed below.)

Finally, having examined the IPEDS annual enrollment data from Fall 2001 through 2009, I noted a sharp spike from 2001 until 2006 in the number of Black/African American students – only 12 in Fall 2001 to a high of 241 in Fall 2006 – followed by a precipitous decline to only 20 African American students in Fall 2008 and 23 in Fall 2009 (see Appendix D). There may be a simple – or a complicated – explanation for this dramatic rise and even more startling drop in African American students over a 2-3 year period, but since I discovered this only after I had ended my visit, I have been unable to determine the reasons for this significant and troubling spike and then plummet in numbers. Regardless, it certainly seems worth examining and considering in future campus conversations about recruitment and matriculation strategies for optimizing student representation.

The representation of faculty diversity is just as salient in significance and perhaps even more fraught with immediate and long-term implications as the student profile may be. Below is a summary of racial/ethnic and gender diversity at national, state, and LSSU levels for Fall 2007. <sup>6</sup>

## LAKE SUPERIOR STATE UNIVERSITY Fall 2007 Faculty Profile

	Men	Women	White	Black	Hispanic (any race)	Asian Pac Isl	American Indian	2 or more races	Non res	Unknown
Nation	58.2	41.8	76.8	5.4	3.6	7.6	.5		4.4	
Michigan*	60.9	39.1	78.3	3.9	1.9	9.3	.5		4.5	
LSSU	61	39	86.5	.96	0	3.8	1.9		6.7	

\*Data for 4-Year Public Universities only

IPEDS; Chronicle of Higher Education

Representation of women among the LSSU faculty is within 3% of the national mean and is equal to the state average in four-year public universities. Women at Lake State cumulatively are more numerous than men in tenured and tenure track positions although women comprise only 1/3 of all tenured faculty. A cursory look at the racial/ethnic diversity of faculty at LSSU reveals that a disconcertingly low 7% are comprised of members of historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. This places LSSU tied with Ferris State University for the 14<sup>th</sup> lowest ranking of minority faculty representation among the 15 public universities in Michigan. Only Northern Michigan comes in lower at 6%. The IPEDS figures for Fall 2007 show only one African American, 2 Native American, 4 Asian American faculty, and no Hispanic/Latino faculty. In fact, only three years later, the virtually monolithic racial and ethnic profile becomes even more charged: during the Fall 2010 semester, there were *no* African American, *no* Hispanic, and *no* Native American faculty, including both full-time and adjunct instructors. Administration fares no better where racial and ethnic diversity is concerned, with no senior executives who are persons of color. There is

only one Native American woman who occupies a Director position on campus. When gender is accounted for, women exceed numerically men in administrative positions.

It would be remiss not to mention the presence of 6.7% foreign-born full-time faculty, almost all in the STEM disciplines. Certainly, they offer both academic and non-academic benefits that contribute significantly to a more multicultural campus environment, and their value in and outside the classroom should not be overlooked or underestimated. Their presence, however, does not mitigate the egregious underrepresentation – the absence – of faculty from historically marginalized and underserved racial/ethnic communities in the U.S.

One of many questions posed by this statistical profile is how much weight and significance the (in)equitable representation of diverse communities could and should bear upon institutional priorities at LSSU. Although the university community has no doubt discussed this issue, likely many times in the past, there is presently no clear direction or criteria that frame campus-wide goals. This question first requires a clear, explicit, public declaration of how diversity is functionally defined and how it aligns with the university's strategic planning priorities.

As noted under Core Component 1b, the racial/ethnic and gender representation is the result of a range of historical and social conditions. There are several variables that should be studied and considered in interpreting and evaluating the demographic profile of diversity at LSSU:

- a. The principal geographical areas from which LSSU student applicants are drawn are the Eastern Upper Peninsula and the Northern Lower Peninsula. Feeder schools in this region are located in rural areas and small towns, and the population in the U.P. is overwhelmingly White, with the exception of a significant Native American presence. Consequently, the yield of students who actually matriculate – first-time freshmen and transfer students – is not surprisingly comprised primarily of White students.
- b. LSSU is located at a distant remove from large metropolitan areas, where well established communities of color, as well as concentrations of recent immigrants, can be found. While there have been long-standing outreach efforts to urban areas throughout Michigan (and into neighboring states),

recruitment of students from these diverse communities face daunting if not insuperable challenges.

- c. There are historical and contemporary forces in Michigan generally and in the U.P. specifically that have inhibited a more proportionate representation of racial and ethnic diversity at LSSU. Because of the historically homogeneous residential population in the U.P. – with the notable exception of the indigenous Native communities – there is a corresponding absence of residential enclaves, resources and services, and consumer options, targeting race-/ethnic-specific peoples. The consequent perception, reasonable or not, that the E.U.P. and the Soo suffer by comparison with metropolitan areas in offering quality-of-life opportunities, becomes a disincentive for prospective students and faculty hires to consider 1) applying in the first instance and/or 2) accepting and deciding to enter LSSU as a student or as an employee. The extent to which this general pattern, well established in research on the factors influencing selection of academic institutions, is applicable to LSSU should be assessed, and appropriate recruitment and retention strategies should be implemented.

Together, these elements virtually ensure a self-perpetuating cycle that militates against both short-term and especially pervasive and lasting diversification of the residential population as well as the campus community. Not surprisingly, the low concentrations of people of color in the region and in the university, historically and currently, discourage ethnically diverse people from moving to the area. Creative incentives and inducements to recruit and retain students and faculty from diverse backgrounds need to be explored and implemented if the profile is to change even marginally.

2. Other than data mandated by federal and state law and by accreditation agencies, studies and evidence focused on the experience of LSSU students, faculty, and staff representing diverse communities are difficult to come by. It's entirely possible that there is a wealth of documentation of the specific needs and experiences of students and faculty of color at LSSU, for instance, but unfortunately, I was unable to locate or access this information, if it exists. I suspect that there is a scarcity of evidence on non-dominant communities perhaps due in part to small numbers but perhaps reflecting an historical pattern of institutional inattention or neglect. It seems to me incumbent upon the university to engage in routine and continuous data gathering and dissemination of diversity-

centered analyses that demonstrate “careful attention to the organization’s function in a multicultural society.” I discuss this further under Core Component 3c in calling for a systematic climate study at LSSU and also in greater detail under Core Component 5a.

PROMISING:

1. The most single most distinctive feature in LSSU’s demographic profile is its extraordinarily high proportion of Native American students. The nearly 8% (and according to campus sources, this figure is low, based on more recent data) that Native students represent on campus exceeds all other universities’ enrollments (by percentage) in Michigan and in the Great Lakes region (Wisconsin, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota). Outside of tribal colleges, Lake State’s Native American student representation surpasses the national average in all institutions of higher education by 8 to 10 times. While the Native American Center at LSSU is providing exceptional services to students, the university as a whole does not seem to be appropriately or systematically acknowledging the presence of this community. An IPEDS breakdown of six-year graduation rates at LSSU reveals that Native Americans cumulatively at 23.8% fall 14.5% below the overall university average (38.3%); however, when disaggregating women from men, the figures show that Native American women are equivalent (and at 38.5% slightly exceed) the overall LSSU graduation rate. While increasing graduation rates is obviously a general student concern, examining the respective progress of Native Americans and other students of color on campus (the underrepresented student graduation rate is only 24%) would provide pragmatic insights facilitating planning deliberations and decisions about retention and graduation strategies for underserved communities on campus. This kind of analysis would go a long way toward demonstrating LSSU’s “careful attention to the organization’s function in a multicultural society.” While recognizing the excellent services and programs presently provided by the Native American Center, there are unrealized opportunities for better serving the Native American cohort (and students from other underserved communities). This invites the general question, what more can and should be done? More specifically, there are significant questions that the university might explore: How do diverse student groups compare in retention and graduation rates? What factors account for the gap between white students and students of color? What current services and programs address racial/ethnic- and gender-specific needs? Which students (and how many) pursue graduate school? What professional and career pipeline

- opportunities are available for students from diverse backgrounds? What current and post-graduate artistic and scholarly opportunities (in the academy and/or in the general community) are accessible to LSSU graduates? What kind of post-baccalaureate engagement in the life and culture of the university, as alumni, do students of color, women, and members of other underserved university groups pursue, and how can alumni from these diverse backgrounds be better served and recruited for continuing exchange and engagement with LSSU?
2. In addition to Native American students at LSSU, there are multiple, intersecting groups that could become key constituencies in marking LSSU as distinctive. LSSU is optimally situated to address the academic needs and interests of first-generation college students; recent immigrants to Michigan and the U.P.; individuals from low-income backgrounds; the unique experiences of those living in the border communities that join the U.S. and Canada; a vital and vocal GLBT community; non-traditional, re-entry adult learners; and women in majors historically dominated by men (including the STEM disciplines but also, Fire Science, Fisheries and Wildlife Management, and Criminal Justice, among others). Serving a region of the state that is distant from large metropolitan areas, LSSU has the capacity and potential to contribute distinctively and substantially to the state's diversity agenda; but university leadership – trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, and students – must be willing to demonstrate real intentionality and accountability in meeting the needs of its diverse constituencies. Lake State occupies a unique niche in the state and in the region, and with a substantive commitment to diversity, equity, and social justice, specific to its mission and location, can become a genuinely “distinctive organization.” As Mohanty has noted: “[Researchers] point to the crucial role played in any democratic society by regional and urban institutions in providing access and social mobility to immigrants and those from lower income groups. If the goal is to reduce social inequality through education, then regional and urban universities need to be both recognized and supported by policy makers at not just the state level but also nationally” (Satya P. Mohanty, *Diversity's Next Challenges*, *Inside Higher Ed*, June 1, 2010, <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2010/06/01/mohanty>)
  3. The assumption (or conclusion) that each campus in a reference cohort (comparator institutions with comparable characteristics) should match, demographically or otherwise, other similarly situated schools virtually ensures frustration, often desperation in a university's good faith efforts to realize diversity commitments. Whatever we might mean by diversity should not entail a one-size-fits-all boilerplate perspective, a kind of generic recipe

or formula or normative profile designating optimal levels of representation of faculty, students, and staff based on race, ethnicity, gender, et al. Contingent upon intentional, bold and decisive leadership, LSSU is poised to define and implement an institutional understanding of diversity as interdependent with academic excellence (termed by the AAC&U as “inclusive excellence”). LSSU is well positioned to capitalize on and leverage its local resources, including focused attention on indigenous communities in the border region of the U.S. and Canada, the GLBT community, students with disabilities, religious pluralism, and non-traditional students. This should not be construed as asserting that diversity initiatives should be restricted only to “home-grown” and local, garden-variety forms of diversity. I am saying that there needs to be a realistic assessment of locally available and underutilized diversity resources on the one hand, and on the other hand, a candid and realistic determination about people from underrepresented and underserved communities that will require proactive outreach and robust recruitment. Make no mistake: the historical disparities and received legacy of injustice and inequality and oppression still must be addressed by all institutions, including LSSU. Focusing on the local as I’m suggesting cannot and must not be a pretext for ignoring or diminishing efforts to comprehensively increase women and people of color among students, faculty, and administrative ranks. The task is to reflect carefully about how to reframe LSSU’s vision of diversity and equity in order to capitalize on the differences that the campus can and should realistically and ethically embrace, authorize, and distinguish as definitive of LSSU’s mission and identity.

### **Core Component 3c: The organization creates effective learning environments.**

Colleges have created multiple learning environments, perhaps without being conscious of the pedagogical rationales behind them. . . . How students interact with other students is often as important as how they interact with faculty, but effective interaction is essential. Mentoring and advising, once thought to be primarily a faculty task, may now be found throughout an organization, particularly in the student services area. All these variables contribute to learning environments, electronic as well as face-to-face. Faculty members are coming to appreciate how they contribute to these environments, fully understanding that the classroom experience is only one part of any learning environment. (3.2-11)

- Assessment results inform improvements in curriculum, pedagogy, instructional resources, and student services.
- ***The organization provides an environment that supports all learners and respects the diversity they bring.***
- Advising systems focus on student learning, including the mastery of skills required for academic success.
- Student development programs support learning throughout the student’s experience regardless of the location of the student.

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#### **PRODUCTIVE:**

1. There are rich and varied examples (and exemplars) of “naturally occurring mentoring,” evident across campus. Faculty invite student collaboration on research and projects; Student Affairs staff assist students based on a “no runaround” commitment (i.e., they will refer students to appropriate services and offices, and even accompany them, as necessary); Quarterdeck and Galley staff greet and converse with students whom they “mentor on the run” (i.e., provide incidental, short-term guidance, care, and simple affirmation). All of these instances and more constitute non-traditional, alternative mentoring that translates into an environment “that supports all learners and respects the diversity they bring.”
2. Co-curricular activities and programming engender a range of both general and community-specific interests. For instance, there was a series of events, speakers, and programs in conjunction with National Coming Out Day, including a “chalking” that addressed GLBT issues, information tables, and a

- nationally recognized speaker who discussed personal and social implications of sexual orientation, sexual identity, and negotiating conflicts around the process of coming out. These instances (among many others) provide learning-centered venues that extend beyond the classroom and address in part diversity-related themes.
3. The Native American Center is doing remarkable, even inspiring work not only with students from indigenous backgrounds but as an inclusive gathering place for cross-community engagement. The Center's facilities and events are open to the campus community and frequently feature "town-gown" opportunities for interaction and exchange, including regularly scheduled potluck lunches that bring together campus and community participants. These monthly gatherings provide sustenance not only through "breaking bread" together but through drumming, music, and other cultural performances. The NAC events build more than a simple sense of community; again, they establish an "effective learning environment . . . that supports all learners and the diversity that they bring."
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#### PROBLEMATIC:

1. During my semester in residence at LSSU, I experienced, witnessed, and collected considerable anecdotal evidence of students from diverse backgrounds interacting openly and comfortably in the Quarterdeck and in many other campus sites. Arguably, this may be a sign that differences in race and ethnicity have been negotiated in such a way that students of color have been integrated into the mainstream predominately White student population. But this may equally be a manifestation of the egregious absence of representative numbers that leave students (not to mention faculty and staff) of color with highly circumscribed options. This may account for the seemingly contrary perception that there may be a significant number of students of color on campus who experience a sense of isolation both individually and collectively, in a variety of sites on campus. That there are few if any services and facilities geared specifically to the needs of students from underrepresented groups may well be both cause and outcome of the inattention to diverse students on campus. I confess readily that my claims here are primarily inferential, given my inability to locate data documenting the experiences of students from diverse backgrounds at LSSU. This may further highlight the need and potential value of conducting a campus

climate study, as well as a comprehensive diversity audit, beginning with a close look at the experience of students, faculty, and staff of color at Lake State.

2. As a counterpoint to my own experiences and observations, I also gathered extensive student reports of what sociologists Leslie Picca and Joe Feagin refer to as “backstage” expressions (informal occurrences taking place out of the public eye in dorm rooms, recreational areas, offices, and other sites on campus) of prejudice and stereotyping, contrasted with “frontstage” bigotry, which manifests in public locations. Students in my two sections of SOCY 103 Cultural Diversity course submitted approximately 1,200 “sightings” (brief narratives) involving issues related to race, ethnicity, gender, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, disability, age. These sightings included direct experiences and observations, as well as media-related viewings. A frequency count reveals that approximately 45-50% of these anecdotal reports based on students’ “real life” experiences and observations involved direct or indirect expressions of prejudice, intolerance and bigotry both on-campus and/or in the immediate vicinity of Lake State. These almost exclusively “backstage” incidences included the use of: racial, ethnic, gendered, religion-based, and homophobic slurs and epithets to refer to students on campus and to acquaintances or fellow employees off campus; casual and unchallenged conversational references to a wide range of stereotypic and demeaning images of persons from diverse communities; commonplace joking and “humorous” asides targeting women, people of color, persons with disabilities, and others, ostensibly intended to be “harmless fun” – one instance reportedly involved routine and constant ridiculing of African Americans (taking place among a group of white roommates) and the use of an actual noose as a prop to enhance the “joke.” My findings, while not entirely surprising and in fact, consistent with similar studies on backstage/frontstage bigotry, conducted at universities across the nation, are nevertheless troubling and symptomatic of strongly embedded attitudes, values, and perspectives that reflect both subtle and overt racism, sexism, homophobia, religious intolerance, and other forms of prejudice. It is important to note that counter to these instances of overt bigotry and “quiet bias,” there were also positive and constructive encounters with difference and moments of resistance to others’ prejudicial and stereotypic expressions and actions. These reports were significantly fewer in number (20-25%), with the remaining narratives primarily descriptive or indeterminate in judgments toward diverse group members.
3. I have noted previously the admirable efforts that the Native American Center has committed to community building with both on- and off-campus

- constituencies. The Center publicizes its events and services widely, but unfortunately, students from the general population on campus have not been as receptive as one might hope. One anecdotal example comes from the two classes that I taught. I asked the 75 students in both sections of my Cultural Diversity course how many knew where the Native American Center was located. Fewer than 10 (all of who were junior or senior level students) were able to identify the physical location. Of the 75 students, none had ever visited the Center or participated in any of the Center's activities, which, as noted, are widely publicized and open to everyone in the campus community.
4. While the campus environment is generally regarded as welcoming and congenial, the quality and degree of inclusiveness are subject to question. Pervasive throughout academic and non-academic sites are organizing and perceptual frames that presuppose and highlight whiteness, patriarchy, heteronormativity, religious (Christian-centric) exclusivity, ableism, and other forms of taken-for-granted sociocultural privilege and entitlement. These frames borrow upon and reproduce social structures that inscribe general relations of power in higher education and in U.S. society generally. The manifest experiences based on these hegemonic forms of privilege pervading the life and culture of LSSU would require another, separate report. One example, though seemingly innocuous to many, is anything but a simple or innocent display of religious tradition. Like universities across the nation, LSSU recognizes and celebrates the holiday season spanning late fall and early winter. A striking difference from most other campuses where I have worked or visited, however, is LSSU's unmediated (and unapologetic) celebration of Christmas without even a token acknowledgment of any other holiday traditions during this time of year. The President's holiday party is publicized as a "Christmas" party; the Native American Center's holiday celebration is labeled as a "Christmas" event; all of the ornamental decorations in the Quarterdeck and elsewhere in many campus offices and public spaces are all about Christmas and Christmas only. Without question, this is the single most Christmas-centric public university I've ever witnessed. Even private colleges whose affiliations represent specific Christian denominations, and virtually all public universities, make concerted efforts to be ecumenical in general and during this time of year in particular. What's missing is not merely the ornamental or gratuitous recognition of Hanukkah or Kwanzaa or Hijra (Islamic New Year) or any other non-Christian seasonal event; what's missing is the institutional understanding that recognition and inclusion of spiritual and religious diversity (not to mention the utterly unacknowledged perspectives of non-believers) is even more important when there are few or no members of non-

Christian communities present who would celebrate these holidays. It's far more critical to highlight other traditions when there are *no* members of other communities present precisely in order to ensure that privilege does not become normalized and diversity does not become reduced to the province of the exoticized, alien Other. This glaring set of absences manifests exactly the predicating, dominant frames of privilege and entitlement that comprise the culture of the university as it currently stands.

PROMISING:

1. There is an incipient but unrealized culture of mentoring that could be developed at LSSU, given the size and character of the organization. Integrated into academic and non-academic practices – teaching, advising, tutoring, providing services and assistance, supervising student workers, etc. – mentoring can and should become a defining feature of how members of the campus community interact with one another. Rather than treating mentoring as exclusively or even primarily a one-to-one, time-intensive relationship, mentoring can be understood as occurring in passing, brief conversations and in simple but meaningful moments. This kind of “mentoring on the run” happens routinely in our encounters with students, co-workers, and colleagues on campus, but we generally don’t reflect upon just how powerful this kind of mentoring can be. This approach has been implemented with great effectiveness and success in demonstrably closing the so-called “achievement gap” among students of color, in increasing retention and graduation rates, and in enhancing overall learning and academic excellence. <sup>7</sup>
2. Lake State has the potential to develop a campus culture that could conceivably become a model for “inclusive excellence,” given the excellent faculty and scholars, dedicated staff, accomplished athletic teams, strong co-curricular and on-campus activities, and the prospect of forging a more intentional approach to diversity, inclusion, and social justice. Toward this end, it might be worth considering the following:
  - a. Extending and enhancing informal (“naturally occurring”) mentoring by forging a *culture* of mentoring across the campus community. There are best practices that would help to initiate, develop, and sustain this approach to low cost/no cost mentoring program development.

- b. Attention should be focused on services and facilities for students representing diverse communities and populations. A systematic determination not only of “felt needs” but a projection of ideal services and facilities would be extremely useful in planning goals and future action plans.
- c. Conducting a systematic campus climate study and diversity audit that would provide the following (among other outcomes):
  - 1) Direct and indirect evidence of the presence (or lack) of inclusive, welcoming, collaborative, and engaged campus interactions, relationships, and practices;
  - 2) Assessment of perceived and actual needs relative to inclusive, collaborative, and engaged relationships;
  - 3) Inventory of exemplars and best practices already in place;
  - 4) Preliminary profile of how students, faculty, and staff representing diverse communities are faring on campus.
  - 5) If entrance and exit interviews (of students, faculty, and staff alike) are not already being conducted, these interactions would provide important data for establishing benchmarks in assessing the breadth, depth, and quality of a campus community that is “inclusive and welcoming.” Current quantitative or qualitative data on campus climate are difficult to locate, making any assessment of campus climate inductive and inferential at best.
- d. Short of a full organizational climate study and a diversity audit, I suggest that a focused inquiry into c.4) above should be considered a priority. I believe that a careful and substantive analysis of the experience of LSSU’s students and faculty of color, for example, might very well provide a lens that would help to define the parameters if not the comprehensive status of inclusion, collaboration, and engagement on campus. Minimally, it would advance and help realize diversity as one of the university’s core values.

**Core Component 4c: The organization assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.**

- Regular academic program reviews include attention to currency and relevance of courses and programs.
  - ***In keeping with its mission, learning goals and outcomes include skills and professional competence essential to a diverse workforce.(4c2)***
  - Learning outcomes document that graduates have gained the skills and knowledge they need to function in diverse local, national, and global societies.
  - Curricular evaluation involves alumni, employers, and other external constituents who understand the relationships among the courses of study, the currency of the curriculum, and the utility of the knowledge and skills gained.
  - The organization supports creation and use of scholarship by students in keeping with its mission.
  - Faculty expect students to master the knowledge and skills necessary for independent learning in programs of applied practice.
  - The organization provides curricular and co-curricular opportunities that promote social responsibility.
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**PRODUCTIVE:**

1. There are both General Education and major-specific requirements for diversity-centered content in the university's curriculum. The significance of diversity appears in both the overarching GE mission statement, as well as in the specific Diversity Outcome statement:

*General Education Mission Statement* ((LSSU 2010-11 Catalog, p. 76):  
In a diverse and changing world, college graduates must be prepared for a lifetime of learning in a variety of fields. In order to meet this challenge, general education requirements foster the development of general skills and knowledge that are further developed throughout the curriculum. LSSU graduates will be able to:

*Diversity Outcome:* View the world from cultural perspectives other than their own.

The GE Diversity requirement offers a range of course options for students (although my understanding is that some of these are only infrequently offered if at all). Specific majors may require additional diversity-related course work, above and beyond minimal exposure in lower-division courses. There are a number of discipline-specific courses focusing on various dimensions of diversity, including race- and ethnic-specific, gender, disability, and religion emphases, which contribute to overall diversity learning.

2. There are several additional indicators that diversity learning is supported by and delivered through multiple modes:
  - a. The academic catalog lists a Native Studies of the Americas minor, which highlights a major regional asset that “localizes” diversity efforts.
  - b. In speaking with individual faculty from different disciplines, it was clear that many teach conventional courses integrating diverse perspectives and content, as well as pedagogical and instructional strategies appropriate to diverse constituencies.
  - c. There is a monthly pedagogy/faculty development series that occasionally addresses diversity-related concerns.
  - d. There are faculty members across campus who are demonstrably committed to a range of diversity and equity issues not only in the classroom but in relation to hiring of faculty and administrative leadership, as well as building a more inclusive and welcoming campus climate.

#### PROBLEMATIC:

1. According to various university sources, the SOCY 103 Cultural Diversity course tends to do the “heavy lifting” in meeting the demand of the GE culture requirement. This is not necessarily an undesirable state of affairs, to the extent that fewer course alternatives may provide greater continuity and coherence in meeting learning objectives and outcomes. (This is certainly open to question, and I expect that this is examined as part of the university’s formal assessment plan.)

There are major-specific diversity requirements that substitute for or complement the general GE requirement, and this “decentralizing” of diversity learning not only has its place but could and perhaps should be extended to other majors/disciplines. That is, often the most effective and relevant diversity courses are those that directly apply to the particular

context and content represented by specific fields of study. For instance, the diversity-focused courses in education, nursing, and business complement the more generalized approach necessarily engendered by the GE version. The issue that may need to be addressed and resolved is whether diversity learning outcomes are being met through this mix of courses that are variously pitched at lower- and upper-division students. Again, this is partially a matter of assessment, but it is also more fundamentally a matter of defining and clarifying how these courses and the curriculum in general are designed to realize diversity learning. Diversity learning cannot be and should not be the sole province of specifically designated courses. The research literature demonstrates that diversity content and competencies are acquired most effectively when these concerns are represented in “diversity across and through the curriculum”: that is, in General Education and/or major-specific courses that target diversity content; in ethnic studies courses (e.g., Native American, African American, Asian American, Latino/Chicano) and other identity- or community-centered courses (e.g., gender studies, queer studies, disability studies); in other major/disciplinary courses, where diversity and equity themes can be appropriately integrated; and in the full repertoire of co-curricular settings (clubs, organizations, athletics, campus events) where diversity can and should be included as a routine dimension of student life and university programs. (Faculty and staff development, likewise, should be centrally engaged in diversity learning as a fundamental element in the learning-centered university.)

Ultimately, questions of continuity and coherence of diversity learning must be raised in the face of little or no curricular follow-up or follow-through after a student has completed a required diversity course (the GE requirement or a major-specific corollary). Students report (and I acknowledge that this is anecdotal) that a single course on diversity is the only exposure many if not most students have in dealing with multicultural issues with any degree of depth. The extent to which diversity-related content is integrated in courses throughout the curriculum is, of course, variable, depending upon specific disciplines, courses, and/or the discretion of individual faculty.

Compartmentalizing diversity learning outcomes primarily in a single required course (and in the uncertain and arbitrary exposure of students to diversity content in other course work) all but ensures that students will gain the “skills and professional competence essential to a diverse workplace” at a rudimentary level at best. Unless and until there are systematically and

- systemically designed opportunities for diversity learning outcomes (DLOs) to be realized consistently across the curriculum, as well as in service learning and in co-curricular experiences, the goals and outcomes of diversity learning are going to be aspirational rather than practicable realities.
2. What complicates the picture is that the university's specific diversity learning outcomes were not immediately apparent in the materials available to me. If there are specific learning outcomes, apart from the Diversity Outcome identified as part of the General Education requirements (quoted above), I was unable to locate them or the university's overall assessment plan, through online and document searches. (Regardless, if DLOs exist, they should be widely disseminated and circulated. If they do not exist, it is incumbent upon the university to formulate a coherent set of DLOs that align with the mission, vision, values, and strategic planning objectives. Absent these learning goals and outcomes, the specific "skills and professional competence essential to a diverse workforce" will remain unclear and undefined for both on- and off-campus constituencies.
  3. An additional complication rests in the scattershot courses that ostensibly represent diversity-based curriculum, which appear to have little coherence within disciplines and across the curriculum. The conspicuous absence of courses focusing on Asian Americans, Latinos, Arab and Muslim Americans, queer studies and other relevant diversity-centered content is troubling. The handful of courses on African Americans reflects disparate and disconnected content. The failure to sustain the Native American minor is a tragically missed opportunity not only for students who are part of indigenous communities, but for the student population as a whole.

## PROMISING

1. Given the rich environment on and off campus for leveraging regional assets and opportunities in and among Native American communities, the Native Studies of the Americas minor should be revitalized at the earliest opportunity. As with any ethnic studies or community-based academic program, the audience for this minor must be defined and recruited proactively and inclusively. The value of ethnic studies programs demonstrably extends beyond the subject community (indigenous peoples in the Americas in this case) and carries relevance and pragmatic benefits for all students on campus. To stand by and allow this minor to remain suspended and in effect, defunct is unwise and without overstatement, a tragedy and a travesty. The presumption that Native American Studies

- cannot be (or is not worth) supporting because few Native American students will pursue it rests upon the historic misunderstanding that ethnic studies are exclusively for a/the subject population. Native American Studies are needed by all students and by the institution itself, especially one that is located in the midst of significant indigenous populations in the immediate locality, in the E.U.P., and in Canada.
2. In addition to re-instituting the Native American Studies courses and minor, the university should explore the possibility of establishing minors in gender studies, disability studies, and a certificate program in diversity studies, all of which could be created in part from existing courses, supplemented by a nominal number of new courses. Even during times of severe budgetary constraints, program and course development must be sustained if the curriculum is to be responsive to the “skills and professional competence essential to a diverse workforce” in the face of changing conditions. While an unchecked proliferation of courses is neither necessary nor desirable, systematic review, revision, and new course development are essential to the educational process. Strategic course revision and development of new courses that integrate diverse perspectives and communities are ways to innovate and augment the profile and marketability of the curriculum and of LSSU as a distinctive institution.
  3. The fusion of a global vision of diversity with the availability and reality of local resources and opportunities provides the context for building a more competitive and desirable school for students and employees from diverse backgrounds and communities. Successful recruitment that yields substantial numbers of students, faculty, and staff of color depends in part on the perceived and actual availability of visible representation of one’s own community, appropriate curricula, relevant programming, and community resources that serve multiple communities. One place to begin on campus is with curricular development and innovation. While a range of diversity-specific courses (e.g., Asian American or Hispanic/Latino survey courses) may not be feasible, however desirable they might be, a more realistic and doable strategy is to promote “diversity across the curriculum” development efforts. This approach could and should also include inclusive pedagogies and training and development opportunities to develop multicultural competencies for faculty, staff, and administrators.

**Core Component 5a: The organization learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.**

There is an expectation in this Core Component that an organization affiliated with the Commission will be proactive in relations with its constituencies. ***Assuming that the organization has a clear sense of who constitutes its constituencies, this proposes that an engaged institution tries to listen to them to discern their educational needs.*** (3.2-16, emphasis added)

- The organization's commitments are shaped by its mission and its capacity to support those commitments.
- The organization practices periodic environmental scanning to understand the changing needs of its constituencies and their communities.
- ***The organization demonstrates attention to the diversity of the constituencies it serves.***(5a3)
- The organization's outreach programs respond to identified community needs.
- In responding to external constituencies, the organization is well-served by programs such as continuing education, outreach, customized training, and extension services.

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PRODUCTIVE:

1. The presence of the Native American Center demonstrates attention to the significant proportion of students who trace their heritage in whole or part to an indigenous background. The Center provides services and resources aimed at meeting the needs and expectations of Native students, while opening its doors to the campus community as a whole and to the surrounding community in the Soo and the E.U.P. Given the numbers of Native American students at LSSU (not all of who necessarily make use of the Center's services), and given the very modest staffing of the Center, the Director and her colleagues provide invaluable support for Native students and others at Lake State.

PROBLEMATIC

1. This is one of the more difficult components to speak to for several reasons. First, as noted under Core Components 1b and 2a, it is difficult to

identify a “clear sense of who constitutes [LSSU’s] constituencies” under the rubric of diverse constituencies; consequently, assessing the extent to which the university “demonstrates attention to the diversity of the constituencies it serves” is problematic at best.

Second, as already noted above, there appear to be limited data, direct or indirect, that would support a reasonable assessment of the lived experience of university members representing diverse backgrounds (using conventional categories based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, etc.). This is not about standard institutional data, which are readily available and accessible. What I had difficulty locating were prior needs assessments, surveys and studies canvassing faculty, student, and staff experiences on campus, interview data, narrative accounts, or any other documentation identifying the “needs and expectations” of specific, historically underserved communities. It thus becomes a matter of inference and educated guesses in offering even a preliminary and tentative reading of Lake State’s campus climate. Accordingly, it remains an open question about the extent to which the university “demonstrates attention to the diversity of the constituencies it serves.”

While some anecdotal accounts representing the general student population are available (e.g., online website testimonies by current students and alumni), there are few if any readily accessible counter-narratives from students of color, GLBT students, students with disabilities, and others from underserved and underrepresented groups on campus. A number of questions necessarily arise: Have students of color ever been engaged in focus groups or intensive interviews? Have the experiences of women in majors or disciplines that have been traditionally dominated by men been documented? Have the unique academic needs and expectations of first-generation university students been assessed? Are faculty and staff (of all racial and ethnic and gender backgrounds, but especially, people of color and women) routinely the subjects of HR intake and/or exit interviews? Have faculty and/or staff of color (and women, and those representing non-dominant groups) ever been interviewed or solicited for information in focus groups?

Third, there seems to be a tacit set of predicating assumptions or guiding principles with respect to diversity and equity matters at LSSU. My very tentative view is that the unspoken predicating assumption for

addressing diversity, equity, and social justice at Lake State is, “First, do no harm.” In relation to diversity commitments at LSSU, perhaps in the whole of the U.P., “Do no harm” figuratively captures the relative inaction, inertia, and laissez faire non-intervention in discussing diversity, equity, and inclusion, much less advancing or advocating for them. “Do no harm” can often be a double-edged sword. It can be a cautionary guideline about not exacerbating an existing injury or illness; or it can be a rationalization for doing nothing in the face of failing to recognize that residual and ongoing harm exists and that systemic problems endure over time. What this amounts to is an institutional rule of (non)engagement. This admittedly inferential perception of LSSU’s organizational inattention and not-so-benign neglect of its declared diversity commitments may warrant careful scrutiny to determine whether it is a pervasively shared concern or a skewed misreading based on my own limited, short-term experience and very partial understanding of the university.

2. Supporting and enabling this laissez faire approach are the invisibility and silence that surround questions of institutional privilege involving whiteness, patriarchy, heteronormativity, religious exclusivity, ableism, and other forms of taken-for-granted entitlement that minimize and repress the advancement of diversity and equity commitments at the university. I don’t mean to suggest that the tacit denial or misrecognition of this “privilege” is in any way deliberately or intentionally malicious. Rather, the force of this privilege resides in its taken-for-granted character and in its unintended impact and effects on persons in underserved and marginalized groups. As Maher and Tetreault observe, “Privilege, in its root meaning, pertains to a law – in this case often silent and unseen – that works for or against individuals and groups. We have learned that to bring a genuine range of experience and perspective to American campuses, not only must the goals of diversity and excellence be conjoined, but the operations of privilege must also be deliberately excavated and challenged” (see Appendix C).
3. That the Director of the Native American Center has also been designated the responsibility for campus-wide diversity is a mixed blessing. The responsibilities for the Center’s operations and for general university diversity issues certainly overlap, and the dual assignment is likely regarded as an expedient use of personnel and resources. However, the cumulative duties and workload associated with being accountable for both positions should be closely examined in terms of capacity. Having twice served as a director of diversity at different institutions, I am familiar with the demands that this position can engender. To expect one

person to be held accountable for what amounts to two full-time positions is unrealistic and counterproductive, even with someone who is as knowledgeable, experienced, and talented as the current Director. Absent adequate staffing, general diversity efforts may be compromised through no fault of the Director. Quite apart from the overload entailed by collapsing these two positions, it would be more productive and potentially more cost-effective if university-wide responsibility for diversity commitments were assigned as a separate position, or if this is not feasible, then as a co-directorship with representatives from both Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. This collaborative partnership would distribute the workload and would serve to integrate diversity commitments more comprehensively into the life and culture of the university.

#### PROMISING:

During open sessions sponsored by the Strategic Planning and Governance Committee, dozens of instances of outreach and direct involvement with schools, arts organizations, community groups, and non-profit agencies were mentioned by a cross-section of faculty and staff. It was clear that a significant number of these projects were directly or indirectly diversity-related. It was equally clear that these academic and non-academic contributions to and realizations of diversity commitments were not widely publicized or known among most members of the campus community. Further, there was little or no apparent alignment of these activities with the university's mission or previous strategic plan. That there are diversity-based programs and projects meeting the needs and expectations of students from diverse backgrounds is undeniable. But without a campus clearinghouse to gather and disseminate news about these activities, and without a diversity plan to provide coherence and to link these efforts to learning outcomes and documented needs, these valuable contributions remain isolated, fragmented, and disconnected. Raising the profile of these existing bridges between town and gown would bring positive attention both on and off campus. Clarifying DLOs and aligning them with the overall strategic plan, assessment strategies, and their implementation through this on- and off-campus engagement would go a long way in demonstrating the university's attention to the diversity of constituencies, as called for by the HLC in this Core Component.

## **SECTION III**

### **A Sense and Semblance of an Ending: Emergent Questions and Recommendations**

I'm titling this closing section, "A Sense and Semblance of an Ending," in order to emphasize the incompleteness and resistance to closure that characterize this very provisional profile of diversity at LSSU. While I have tried to offer a candid and constructive analysis of the general state of diversity on campus, I understand fully that my perspective is constrained by my limited experience and knowledge of Lake State. Moreover, a more comprehensive diversity audit would address the following areas (among others) that were not examined in this report: the university's assessment plan and its alignment with mission and core values; service learning and campus-community engagement; faculty, staff, and administrative development of diversity-based knowledge and competencies; human resources policies, procedures, and practices relative to hiring (recruitment, search-and-screen, appointment and advancement processes) and retention of all employees (including student workers); admissions outreach and recruitment plans; disciplinary and complaint protocols for all members of the campus community; fiscal policies and procedures in purchasing, acquisitions, contracting, auxiliary services; EEO and harassment/discrimination procedures; delivery of academic support services, student services, alumni services; and the structure, function, and operation of the Board of Trustees in advocating for and advancing diversity and equity. It's evident that much more could and should be said, but I've gone about as far (very likely, too far) with my presumptuousness as I dare!

#### **Emergent Questions**

There is a series of overarching questions emerging from this analysis that I believe might help to frame current and future conversations and planning around diversity issues at LSSU.

- What does it mean to say that diversity is a core value? How does this value manifest in planning, policies, procedures, and practices? In what ways does valuing diversity at LSSU contribute to its standing as a "distinctive organization"?

- How is diversity understood in and by the university community? What roles if any do equity and social justice play in how diversity commitments are deployed and realized across the university?
- What are the university's plans for diversity development in the short term and long term? How do the history and traditions of Lake State factor into strategic planning for diversity?
- What systematic and systemic goals and functions do faculty, staff, and students envision for diversity learning?
- Where do diversity and equity commitments rank in current and future prioritizing of university allocations and resources?
- What are the recruitment, hiring, and development and retention plans for hiring more racially and ethnically diverse faculty, staff, and administrators?
- What strategies will most effectively increase applicants and yield of matriculated students representing diverse, underserved communities?
- In what ways are current diversity efforts assessed in teaching and learning; in co-curricular activities and student, faculty, and staff organizations; in administrative and staff operations; and in the general life and culture and the everyday practices of the campus community?
- What kind and degree of priority will diversity as a core value be afforded in principle and in practice, given the financial realities the university faces now and for the foreseeable future? How committed to demonstrable change and advancement of diversity and equity initiatives is Lake State's leadership, including faculty, students, and staff, senior administrators, and the Board of Trustees?

### **Recommendations**

1. Formulate a diversity mission statement and an institutionally sanctioned (including Board-approved) statement of diversity commitment and philosophy (an organizational credo, beyond the standard EEO compliance statement that already exists). General and specific diversity goals need to be identified and aligned with the university's mission and strategic plan.

2. Explore the possibility of adopting and integrating the paradigm of “inclusive excellence,” as recommended by the AAC&U.
3. Designate joint coordination of diversity initiatives to representatives from both academic and student affairs, who would also co-chair the Diversity Committee.
4. The Diversity Committee (in collaboration with faculty governance and HR) could (perhaps should) become the principal conduit for faculty and staff diversity development opportunities. The committee would also take the lead in initiating proposals on comprehensively integrating diversity as essential to a distinctive, learning-centered university.
5. Campus leadership should re-visit and review the 2005 progress report from LSSU to the HLC. It seems clear that this document was far more aspirational than factual in its characterization of diversity goals, strategies, and programming at Lake State. However, many of the observations and strategies in this report have much to recommend them. While they may not have been an entirely accurate depiction of the actual status of diversity issues (and the report was largely absent of any documentation of the lived experience of students, faculty and staff from diverse communities), the document nevertheless may offer a useful point of departure in mapping the present standing and future vision of diversity at LSSU.
6. Implement simple, low-/no-resource diversity-based strategies. Inasmuch as “wide and deep” racial/ethnic representation is unlikely to occur any time soon, the exigency for focusing efforts on campus-wide diversity learning in any and all venues is arguably even greater than in environments where diverse communities are numerous and conspicuous.
7. Augment the profile and value of the substantial community of Native students on campus, and declare publicly an institutional commitment to better serve this population. Accordingly, the Native American Center merits greater institutional visibility, resources, and clout to enhance its exceptional work with students and with community outreach and programming. Begin by focusing energy and resources on developing Native American curricular and co-curricular resources, and re-establishing the Native Studies of the Americas minor.
8. The Diversity Committee (or other appropriate parties) should work closely with Human Resources to develop diversity- and equity-based training and development opportunities, if they do not already exist. Presently, it appears that the listing of HR training videos and materials includes no titles referencing race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion, or any discernible diversity-based topic.

9. Diversity learning outcomes need to presuppose an integral and systemic approach to developing multicultural knowledge and competencies. The fragmented and discontinuous course work, including the single course GE requirement, is insufficient.
10. Conduct a campus climate study and a comprehensive diversity audit.

Although I believe that there are substantive concerns involving matters of institutional philosophy and operating principles, as well as problematic academic and organizational practices that must be addressed in order to advance diversity and equity at LSSU, I also have witnessed and directly experienced how diversity is actualized in the lives and actions of students, faculty, and staff across campus. Further, I have observed a wide range of unspoken and unrealized opportunities for integrating diversity and equity in support of academic excellence at Lake State. This latent potential, as deep as it is wide, will require vocal and forceful leadership from all constituencies in the campus community. Public discourse that consistently and relentlessly advocates diversity and equity in principle and most importantly in practice, needs to emanate especially from the highest ranks of administration. Faculty, staff, and students must equally raise questions, identify problems, and explore opportunities for advancing diversity issues. Continuing what presently appears to be muted if not altogether silent support for diversity will virtually ensure that it continues to be a rumor far more than a reality. Carried forward by the best efforts of a critical mass of individuals on campus, a workable and visionary action plan for diversity is possible and practicable.

Much needs to be done. Although diversity as a core value is presently far more incipient than realized in the everyday life and culture of LSSU, the opportunities are resonant and vibrant, awaiting only the institutional will and commitment to make them real and give them life.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> A complete list of references used in preparing this report is available upon request.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to four-year public universities in Michigan, I also examined regional data, reflecting racial, ethnic, and gender representation comparing Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Minnesota. These data are available upon request.

<sup>3</sup> In this report, I have not analyzed the university's assessment plan due to limited time and an inability to locate and access assessment documents.

<sup>4</sup> As the HLC recognizes elsewhere, race and ethnicity are only two dimensions of diversity, and of course, other elements and communities must be factored into any organizational profile.

<sup>5</sup> Fall 2008 is the most recent period that comparative data at national, state, and local levels are available.

<sup>7</sup> Fall 2007 is the most recent period that comparative data at national, state, and local levels are available.

<sup>7</sup> The Educational Opportunity Program at California State University, Northridge, has implemented this mentoring approach with considerable success. See EOP's "Faculty Mentoring Program" at: [http://www.csun.edu/eop/fmp\\_index.html](http://www.csun.edu/eop/fmp_index.html)

## Appendices

- Appendix A: Graduation Rates 2008 6-Year Grad Rate by Race OR Gender
- Appendix B: Graduation Rates 2008 6-Year Grad Rate by Race AND Gender
- Appendix C: Frances A. Maher and Mary Kay Tetreault, "Diversity and Privilege," AAUP Academe Online, American Association of University Professors (AAUP).  
<http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2009/JF/Feat/mahl.htm>.)
- Appendix D: LSSU Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Gender 2001-2009
- Appendix E: "Making Excellence Exclusive," Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).  
[http://www.aacu.org/compass/inclusive\\_excellence.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/compass/inclusive_excellence.cfm)
- Appendix F: Robert J. Sternberg, "No Contradiction," Inside Higher Ed. , March 7, 2011  
[http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2011/03/07/essay\\_on\\_idea\\_that\\_inclusivity\\_and\\_academic\\_excellence\\_are\\_not\\_contradictory](http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2011/03/07/essay_on_idea_that_inclusivity_and_academic_excellence_are_not_contradictory)
- Appendix G: Michigan 4-Year Public Universities Student Demographics by Rank

## **Appendix A**

### **Graduation Rates 2008 6-Year Grad Rate by Race OR Gender**

## **Appendix B**

### **Graduation Rates 2008 6-Year Grad Rate by Race AND Gender**

## **Appendix C**

**Frances A. Maher and Mary Kay Tetreault, “Diversity and Privilege”**  
**AAUP Academe Online, American Association of University Professors (AAUP)**  
<http://www.aup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2009/JF/Feat/mahl.htm>.)

## **Appendix D**

### **LSSU Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity & Gender 2001-2009**

## **Appendix E**

**“Making Excellence Exclusive”**

**American Association of University Professors (AAUP)**

[http://www.aacu.org/compass/inclusive\\_excellence.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/compass/inclusive_excellence.cfm)

## **Appendix F**

**Robert J. Sternberg, “No Contradiction”**

**Inside Higher Ed., March 7, 2011**

[http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2011/03/07/essay\\_on\\_idea\\_that\\_inclusivity\\_and\\_academic\\_excellence\\_are\\_not\\_contradictory](http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2011/03/07/essay_on_idea_that_inclusivity_and_academic_excellence_are_not_contradictory)

## **Appendix G**

### **Michigan 4-Year Public Universities Student Demographics by Rank**